

Article

No Lords A-Leaping: Fanon, C.L.R. James, and the Politics of Invention

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Abstract: What happens to Fanonism when, instead of resistance or liberation, it becomes a discourse of invention? What happens to Fanon’s critique of colonialism and his imagining of a decolonial future, when that critique and imagining are staked not on the refusal of racial humanity itself (in the sense of an appeal to a “new humanism”...), but in the sense that Fanonism itself, as such, would be a discourse and reading of invention? In this essay I compare Fanon’s reading of invention with that of C.L.R. James’s reading of spontaneity in Notes on Dialectics.

Keywords: Frantz Fanon; C.L.R. James; Hegel; will; invention; Lenin; sovereignty

1. Preface

What happens to Fanonism when, instead of resistance or liberation, it becomes a discourse of invention? What happens to Fanon’s critique of colonialism and his imagining of a decolonial future, when that critique and imagining are staked *not* on the refusal of racial humanity itself (in the sense of an appeal to a “new humanism”...), but in the sense that Fanonism itself, as such, would be a discourse and reading of invention? In the sense, then, in which Fanonism defines its task from the first work in 1952, which refers to itself as a step, to the final, posthumous work of 1961, which refers to the need to take one step more, one step further, to set afoot a new man in the radical transformation of all areas of colonial culture. What would be the stakes, the nature and validity of such a step, which goes beyond anything that we might term a politics or philosophy of invention? Only today can it be indicated what form this step has taken. Indeed, Fanon defines the main task of his work as a series of *leaps* or steps

characterized by points of departure rather than endings. This emphasis is no less noticeable in his early work than in his last. It would therefore be wrong to underestimate the value of such leaps and the steps they open up (in philosophy and politics). Posed in theoretical terms the question would therefore be: What happens when, in Fanonism, one was to present or retrace those steps as a question of invention?

2. Invention

“I created a people, and I was unable to create men.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

“I should constantly remind myself”, writes Fanon, “that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence” ([1], p. 229). And just before this sentence: “I am not a prisoner of History [*l’Histoire*]. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny” ([1], p. 229). In all of Fanon’s writings I know of no passage that sums up, to the same extent, the enigma of his thought. The point of these gestures seems to be that “invention”, so often invoked as though it were *eo ipso* something historical, is here the figure for a kind of radical untimeliness that entails a leap, and this leap cannot be anticipated, nor can it be prepared for, nor can it be traced back to a prior historical moment to be interrogated as such. To leap, then, is more than a rhetorical figure; indeed, we need to see it as the very conceptuality that Fanon puts into play here, as that which cuts through the continuum of history: and in its wake only remnants remain. Fanon needs to remind himself of this. He needs to remind himself of the devastating consequences of invention *and* of history. (In this he is closely related to Benjamin, whose *angelus novus* is just as essentially a figure of danger and hope (*cf.* [2])). Invention, because it is a radical transformation, is not reducible to economy or strategy, and therefore, we might want to say, yet another form of political calculation. Nor is it a mode for utopia, whose possibility can now be resurrected in a myth of perfectibility, when the oppressed take a dialectical leap into the “open air of history” ([2], p. 253). This is why invention is not reducible to any kind of teleological schema. Despite the primary role which history plays in the meaning of colonial subjection, clinging to its truth or whatever happens to be regarded as its truth can only be imprisoning, or backward-looking, for the inventor.

Although none of Fanon’s texts are explicitly devoted to this configuration, the ethical-political implications of invention can be seen throughout Fanon’s work, although it is less obvious what these implications might be. I want to argue that this situation is already inventive, insofar as it gives rise in Fanon’s work to a singular politics of invention, and one premised on a leap that is neither a catastrophe or fall, advent or realization and is mostly incomprehensible to what came before. From there it is but a step to the notion that invention *is* revolution and that the true task of politics is to embrace or demand this imperious leap. Political reinvention, on this view, begins with interruption or fracture, and not memory or recollection, and cannot but appear as violent to the use of traditional concepts, in politics, of negation and affirmation. Therefore, if one says—as Fanon has just said—that this invention can never be “enslaved” by the past, and its meaning circumscribed by history, what the leap implies is a situation of radical indecision whose emergence introduces something entirely new into the world.

To do justice to Fanon's thinking one must therefore never lose sight of invention—which, to be sure, opens up a fracture or hole in History. This more explicitly radical opening can be characterized as taking place in a space between a “phenomenological” critique of race (including the space given to race by Césaire or Sartre), and a “political” attempt to retrieve a sense of rebellion that avoids the “pitfalls” of spontaneity: vengeance, indiscipline, an immediacy which is both “radical and totalitarian” ([3], p. 105). Fanon wants both to register the force of phenomenology's (or more radically) Sartre's suspicion of historicism in the traditional figuring of black invention, and Césaire's powerful claim, in his *Cahier*, that blackness be re-considered first as anti-invention, prior to what he calls the purity of its failure. There is, however, a caveat: Sartre's rendering of negritude slams the door shut on black creativity and encloses it in an historicism; and in Césaire, black existence, whose meaning plunges from abyss to mythical abyss, finds a last refuge in a “‘bitter brotherhood’ that imprisons all of us alike” ([1], p. 124). The reference to Césaire seems almost as essential to Fanon as the reference to Sartre, and one way of tracking a path through Fanon's work is to follow the great chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* devoted to Césaire's *Cahier* and Sartre's *Orphée Noir*. In this chapter on *le vécu noir*, or black lived experience, the focus is on how Sartre reduces black creativity to neo-Marxist truth or dogma and how Césaire renders black existence in terms of predetermined myths. Both positions, incidentally, are felt to be imprisoning: they cease being inventive the moment they sublimate the heterogeneous and singular into fixed ontologies or concepts.

On the other hand, nothing closes off this possibility more clearly than the insistence that the main focus or concern of Fanon's work is with “humanism”. It is certainly not in itself illegitimate or foolish to approach Fanon with this insistence on humanism, but this has led some commentators to assume on Fanon's part complicity with a certain “narrative” of liberation whose ending, typically, accentuates reconciliation and redemption rather than upheaval or interruption. There are, however, good reasons for thinking that this configuration of liberation, and the sovereignty subsequently disappointed or confirmed through it, is a limited way of responding to Fanon's thinking on invention. The reasons for this can be stated quickly: it is misguided to expect Fanonian invention to answer to the concept of humanism and narratives of liberation just because these are just as limiting as are the narratives or concepts of history—and insofar as Fanon's constant concern has been to comprehend how the invention (of the wretched say) exceeds the metaphysics of humanism, and how invention itself unravels the thinking of politics on which dialectical humanism is based. Nothing is further from invention than its caricatural prejudgement.

In this way, the political demand on Fanonism to be a discourse of humanism falls foul of a structure it is probably easiest to formulate in the context of his discussions, in the late 1950s, of Europe. “[I]f we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries” ([3], p. 315). What is involved here is the sense that for decolonialism to be fulfilled, it must not “imitate” the European model, for that would be to remain under the spell of its historicity and its racist account of the human. In the final sentences of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes this project as the working out of “new concepts” as “we try to set afoot a new man” ([3], p. 316). The taking of such a step is a key figure for his characterization of invention (and it should perhaps go without saying that such a step is intimately linked to the real leap), a characterization that stands in sharp distinction to

European humanism, where imitation is already the figure for the erasure of invention's distinctive traits ([3], p. 313).

A number of readings of Fanon appear to offer powerful ways of *reducing* the problem of invention to various humanisms, so that Fanonism might plausibly be seen as *no more than* a particular use of Sorelian language, a particular politics of *ressentiment* or a conditioned alienated response to recognition as such, always to be finally explained *by something else* (biography, psychology, masculinism, racialism, dialectics, *etc.*), that something else being the excuse not to read the text in question. Fanon's impatient interrogation of these discourses involves demonstrating that in every case the very concepts supposed to operate the reduction of invention to humanism are themselves blind to invention as politics. According to the group he would later describe as the "wretched", whose invention has no place, or identity, is "less-than" nothing, just because its exclusion comes to occupy a place that is nothing, without ethos or privilege, but a place, a *néant* that also produces an opening, a fracture in the body politic, and whose form has no form other than that of a ceaseless negativity. The "wretched" is not an identitarian category, nor is it a disidentitarian category (in the sense of the promise of community). It signifies that which is radically heterogeneous and yet necessary and constitutive; the wretched are a "gangrene" at the heart of the colony that cannot be absorbed or eradicated: the inassimilable. The spontaneity of these "less-than-men" brings with it fundamental changes in colonial politics, and precisely where politics appears to be petit-bourgeois, elitist, neo-Marxist or nationalist ([3], p. 104). Indeed, certain of the strategies of mass mobilization traditionally relied upon by the political parties will have to be sacrificed (that is to say, reinvented) while the transformation of politics into war in the colony, so far resolutely ecstatic and energetic, will eventually materialize in new political forms (if, however, the struggle permits it). This struggle, reputed to be constitutive of the "people", is a revolutionary movement that Fanon very precisely places beyond the pitfalls of party politics where it can so easily be destroyed or shattered.

Fanon's thinking on invention, it now seems reasonably clear, follows a rhythm, a grammar (which I have often called a future perfect), a rhetoric, which shuttles between what could be traditionally distinguished as sovereignty and enslavement, asserting the priority of neither and the subordination of both to a wider movement neither is in a position to understand. All of which can be discerned in the following two articulations:

- (1) Invention can be approached, or experienced, as a kind of *extravagant expenditure*. Which is not simply to say that it acts as a kind of surplus, or step beyond existence, but that it accomplishes an interruption, a new signification of existence; in short, invention itself functions as a leap, a crossing, with neither closure nor center; thus it answers not to a preordained meaning, even a teleological one, but to a constitutive movement, an insemination, or a deformation (of politics). Taking the word literally, it may be said that invention is a *beginning*, a step, an activity of production, an inauguration. In such invention I exceed division, difference, and economy. It follows that invention is opposed to what Fanon calls "petrification", a term that he uses (in *The Wretched of the Earth*) to describe the psycho-biopolitical affects of colonialism on the bodies and culture of the colonized. The relation of this term, with its etymological meaning of being turned into stone, opens up a host of further questions which have, very precisely, to do with how racialization mortifies the "culture" and "*Erlebnis*" [lived experience] of life in the colony (*cf.* [1]). There are two modes

of signification which can be attributed to this signifier: it refers to how the imposition of colonial culture not only produces a certain *style* of embodiment (petrified, rigidified, inanimate, ankylotic), but to the extent to which all aspects of colonial culture have become racially reinvented, the colonial body mimes or act outs these various rigidities as the continuous message of its own subjugation; in short, petrification refers to an institutionalized experience of *ressentiment*, and a kind of censorship which literally excludes, or limits, the libidinal energy that coincides with invention. A second emphasis suggests that petrification (as it becomes co-extensive with local cultural knowledge) takes on radically different forms among the colonial bourgeoisie and the peasants/workers; the latter suggests a different libidinal economy of expenditure than the former, as well as a different aesthetic and ideological style of desire, evoking a differing memory of oppression (and, therefore, of liberation).

- (2) Similarly, the subjective *infinity* of invention refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the bad infinity criticized by Hegel) but to that of the *real of fantasy*; if racist fantasy is defined by its limits, by the radically symbolic nature of ideology, invention represents, for Fanon, the perpetual generation of contiguities, or carryings-over; crossings in which the self is forced to bear witness to a certain feeling of unfamiliarity, where its easy security breaks down, where the giddiness and “almost pathological trance” following the “death of the other” (the enemy) becomes, as it were, possessed by the real of revolution; it follows that through the continuously subversive force of invention the self can be itself only in its difference to that which exceeds and jolts it ([3], p. 111). Or, as Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself” ([1], p. 229). Invention is thus dis-locative, metonymical, whereas racialization follows limited rules of enunciation that remain recuperative, fixed, metaphorical. And so, although invention is never able to stop the subject from abandoning itself *de facto* to racist fantasy, that is to say, those desires that lead it to project itself as a boundary or limit to experience (and so forge dangerous and delusory fictions about others), it is in the nature of invention, as Fanon repeatedly stresses, to disturb the form and meaning of such fantasy (conceived of, so to speak, as the limit-work of certain racist effects). It does so by forcing the colonial subject to recognize its own racist fictioning, and so reflect on his or her identifications in the colony. Equally, though, and by the same token, the irresistible character—or the *Trieb*—of invention will be recognized and stated by the subject itself as the infinite limit of its own becoming. The imperative *to be* alone will be capable of making this impulse disclose what the racialized subject is lacking: the imaginary plenitude of a racial being it can never hope to equal, possess or represent via a figure proper to it. To illustrate these points let us return, briefly, to the politics of racialization.

Fanon’s conception of the racialized body inevitably changes from a fantasmatic conception to a conception of a “corps à corps” (one’s body is always already a body for others). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, the thematics changes from petrification to a kind of radical *tabula rasa* or disinvestment of the colonial subject: “the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up” ([3], p. 27). What is the relationship of depetrification to this image of the *tabula rasa*? To all appearances, it is one of making explicit the “absolute depersonalization” undergone by the colonized, which in turn calls for the “absolute violence” of the *tabula rasa* aimed at the social

structure (with its petrification of cultural life) ([4], p. 53). Hence Fanon's view of the revolution as a moment of invention, in which depetrification allows (reinvents) the discharge of an entirely new expenditure of muscular tensions which also allows new relations of love and pleasure, and new forms of aesthetic culture (music, poetry, and dance) to appear. *From social death to tabula rasa*, for Fanon, destructive violence is the process through which the socially dead acquire a new symbolic form. An analysis of Fanon's writings on decolonial war reveal this violence to induce a kind of vertigo or anguish, and a form of radical expenditure that is not exchangeable, and does not enter into a sacrificial logic (of the gift); here the new form of the human no longer enters into the purview of tragic politics, or revolutionary dialectics, but has the appeal of an almost ecstatic transformation or annihilation, preserving the rupture and movement of the tabula rasa. In the decolonial struggle, violence has a regulatory function insofar as it is detoxifying and destructive, creative and reinventing.

3. Invention as Reading

From the first to the last, all of Fanon's writing answers two, intertwined imperatives: Fanonism is at once a *therapeutics*, at once generated and measured by Fanon's work in the clinic, and a *messianics*, driven by the violence and artifice of colonial race war during the Algerian war of independence. For Fanon the two are not contraries, for both are concerned with what disturbs, or dissipates, the degradation and abjectness of colonial culture. Invention is the figure for this affirmation; it affirms precisely the psychic and political limits of racialization. How? Exactly by a certain reflection on historical disobedience, the musculature of certain passions, whose very existence (at the level of voice, facial expressions, gestures), is subject to a kind of libidinal energetics. The urgency of freeing the subject from abjection is a task that Fanon sets against both the tribunal of historical judgment and the visceral 'truths' of colonialism.

Black Skin, White Masks envisages itself as a "mirror" in such a way that the reader who sees himself reflected in it "will have made a step forward" on the "road to disalienation" ([1], pp. 14, 184). And yet, "Only a few of those who read this book will understand the problems that were encountered in its composition" ([1], p. 11). It is strange to come across a work that begins like this, with talk of a truth so fervid that it prevented the book from having been written "three years ago"; whose fire no longer burns; but whose reading for the reader will cause him or her to descend "to a level where the categories of sense and non-sense are not yet invoked" ([1], p. 11). There is of course a ready explanation for it. Fanon addresses his "Introduction" to those readers who lack the ability "to accomplish this descent into a real hell", and for whom an "authentic upheaval" is yet to begin ([1], p. 10). The book may be regarded as Fanon's attempt to affect such an upheaval, whose necessity is attested to by dint of truths already experienced. To read *Black Skin, White Masks*, then, is to take a step forward, to descend to a place where sense and non-sense have yet to be differentiated, an indeterminate place where the text situates its very *readability* as a text. As a result, Fanon addresses his book to those readers who will come to see themselves in the details of its afterimage, as it were, and be changed by the reflection. "Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation", he continues, he is also "doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths he has worked out for himself one after another" ([1], p. 10). In grasping these truths readers of the book will not only re-cognize them as untruths, and hence their misrepresentation, but will ultimately *see into* how they themselves sustain what appears to be true but that cannot finally be true. Until this recognition, the reading of *Black Skin,*

White Masks will be inseparable from a repetition in which there is nothing genuinely new. In brief, there is a ceaseless restlessness by which invention comes down to us. And any thinking worthy of the name must be open to its task.

It follows from this situation not only that reading-as-dissolution is itself a step forward, but that it can be taken to exemplify the conflict between the recognizably familiar and the insight that allows us to grasp the non-permanent nature of truth. The fact that reading is not just a tranquil act of deciphering, but an encounter or an upheaval that reading can never read as such, is to be *inventive* (for here the reader is turned inside out, forced to disappear inside its own limited conception). Being inventive means being open to what falls outside of what might be taken to dictate or prescribe final truths. In this sense any reading worthy of the name is inventive, and inventive not at all in the interests of expressing mere subjective freedom, but in the response to those occasions when meaning evades any absolute horizon of truth.

On this construal, a certain apparent untimeliness (what I have been calling invention) opens the possibility of a leap whose relation to history is necessarily dissolute, irresponsible, *blackening*. For Fanon's work does not just reflect, in a way we might want to call political, on the relation to the untimeliness of invention in general, but also, on occasion, within that moment, reflects on the untimeliness of blackness in particular, and indeed does so increasingly with respect to time and history. We have already seen some of the doubts raised in *Black Skin, White Masks* about final truths that are used to establish a certain inventive relation to textuality itself: let us now turn to those texts for an elaboration of what he says about this untimeliness, and what must be understood here as its reading, in the sense of will, upheaval, dissolution.

4. Volonté and Violence

“A people are always their own invention.”

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalisation*

In seeking a more substantial definition of what appears in Fanon's work as invention, it is well to go back to the term *volonté*, or will. It has to be remembered that invention is not necessarily a process of emancipation; that is to say, it does not directly subvert the relation between repression and freedom. What invention changes, more profoundly, is the driving link between time and event which, as such, is not predetermined, and is not given to be read as the expressive channel of an alienated or repressed will. It is thus useful to ask why Fanonism continues to be read as the *animation of a liberatory, emancipatory, unitary will* that has its origin in the people as totality? It may well be that Fanonism retains something of this emancipatory agency; the politics of invention, however, endows *volonté* with a different meaning.

In 2011 Peter Hallward published his essay “Fanon and Political Will”, which presents a correlation between “an emancipatory ‘will of the people’” and “*volonté*” as the “guiding priority” of Fanon's work ([5], pp. 104–05). The following remarks based on it are not intended to refute it; we shall have to insist that the fruitfulness of this reading is far removed from what Fanon had in mind when he focused on the apparently marginal motif of *taking a step*, a small forward step, in order to take the real leap of invention. Hallward's essay on Fanon is characterized by a fundamental question: namely to ask (and so to question) why this will of the people has been “thoroughly forgotten if not repressed”

by postcolonial studies and to show why any return to Fanon “worthy of the name must involve the forgetting of this forgetting” ([5], p. 105). To read Fanon, on this view, must begin with the active, critical memory of political will—a tradition that includes Hegel, Marx, Rousseau, the Jacobins, Mao, Castro, Che Guevara, Giap, and Mandela—that has been repressed or forgotten by postcolonial studies. In this way, any reading of Fanon that falls foul of this formulation of *volonté* (and its history) is subsequently discredited as an unworthy response to the “real significance” of Fanon’s work ([5], p. 104). There are, however, good reasons for thinking that this return to Fanon is itself a naïve and disappointing way of responding to the challenge and radicality of Fanon’s work. The reasons for this can be formulated rapidly: it is misguided to expect Fanon’s work to answer to the concept of an “autonomous political will” just because this is a traditional political concept—and insofar as it forgets Fanon’s constant concern to remember and comprehend that which exceeds sovereignty and politics: the leap which reinvents the foundational claims of both history and politics insofar as both rely on the racial ‘invention’ of the human and of humanism as such. The latter serves to discredit Hallward’s historiography seriously, and one has other reservations about his thesis, which states that Fanon was on the road to Leninism (the priority and identity of that Leninism poses a question to which I shall return). As for the attitude of a *worthy* return to Fanon, it is moralistic, with prescription as its most striking characteristic.

What is it that postcolonial studies has failed to think in failing to remember *volonté*? Hallward has an apparently straightforward answer: *Fanonism is a political voluntarism* ([5], p. 105). The will of the people, he says, recurs throughout the posthumous collection *Toward the African Revolution*, in such phrases as “the national will of the Algerian people”, “national will of the oppressed peoples”, where the emerging will of the nation is what defines the people as sovereign, but what makes possible that self-constitution is never really thought through, though Hallward will draw on Fanon’s later work to argue that “solidarity with others is a matter of freely assumed commitment, rather than an automatic orientation inherited by a community” ([5], p. 106). It is at this point (the insistence on a freely assumed commitment) that Hallward makes a discreet but ambitious displacement with respect to Fanon’s arguments in his late work. The question of will (as a figure for the emerging nation) should not be separated from that of revolutionary spontaneity or organization: the latter refers to the place of politics in the constitution of *volonté* (a word which is significantly ambiguous, at once decision and desire, agency and act); the status and concept of spontaneity, however, is never the result of organization, nor is it to be confused with the enunciation of a general will; spontaneity re-acquires the strong sense of impulse or drive in Fanon’s work, whereas *volonté* is invariably inscribed in a politics of organization or desire. As for invention, it has already been said that it is not a search for a less confined, less suffocating *self*-representation, but registers an upheaval within petrified meaning itself, in which subjects are exposed to the void where truth disappears into illusion.

Discussing colonial subjection himself, Fanon elaborates (in that context) a description of *failure* in the sense of *engine failures* [*moteur a des ratés*]. This phrase, which seems to imply that the psyche of the colonized has come to a halt, or at the very least that it has undergone a seizure generated by something ankylotic (understood here as petrification), seems to put into question the rhetoric of will or decision. Within these petrified individuals, the emergence of national will is an emergence that makes the ankylosis appear as such, and in so doing, no doubt makes possible the appearance of inhibitions in a specific sense. The machinery of the colony not only generates, but also suppresses,

and in a way that shows how the colonized are undermined at key points by symptoms—a word completely missing from Hallward’s account—that are neither conscious nor willed, neither inner nor outer. (At several points in his later work, Fanon refers to how tradition can in effect “canalize” the “most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence” ([3], p. 57).) Will (as the language of emancipation has it) ushers in a new animation, but what it actually establishes overall, and particularly in Hallward’s narrative, is the disclosure of the codes of petrification. In complete contrast, invention shows how *limited* is this conception of animation-as-liberation; invention is not a conversion of the lytic, it assigns it a clearly defined function as a fetish, fantasy, or myth. This is why Fanon calls for a *tabula rasa*. The very fact that invention entails a still more radical undertaking than emancipation thus deprives the existential notion of freely assumed commitment of its authority at the outset. How this is done is illustrated, for example, by the turn of phrase by which Fanon introduces the book to the reader. “This book is a clinical study”, he writes, of “the *state of being* a Negro” ([1], pp. 14–15). “White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro. I shall demonstrate elsewhere that what is often called the black soul is a white man’s artifact” ([1], p. 16). Even here, such artifactuality is only presented in terms of the racialized code of a deviation: the colonized are the sign of a deviation, but they cannot be simply freed from this deviation by recourse to a purer self, for the colonized is this state, its own artifact; it has no other contents to discover itself anew. It is perhaps, then, surprising to find such sentences taken as the grounding of a voluntaristic outlook. Hallward has two decisions to make concerning Fanon’s “voluntarism”, and they are quite different in their tenor and scope. The first, based on an acceptance of these descriptions, suggests that, accepting that voluntarism is a matter of volition or will as opposed to “compulsion”, “instinct”, impulse, means that political will “affirms the primacy of a conscious decision and commitment, independent of any ‘deeper’ (*i.e.*, unconscious determination, be it instinctual, historical, or technological)” ([5], p. 107). The same disparaging sweep is applied to everything that contradicts this primacy—the clinical writings on colonial war and torture, the case histories on fetishism and negrophobia, *etc.* It would be interesting to know how Fanon would respond to such a description of his work! Thus far, then, Hallward is imposing on Fanon an opposition which is on the one hand aimed at an explicit reduction of Fanon’s *political* reading of psychoanalysis, and on the other focusing on a valorized set of terms that are used to reduce and explain, but to which they remain blind, the role of the unconscious in Fanon’s analysis of the role of *perversity* in colonial power relations, *i.e.*, the ways in which subjection and mastery are both enacted and *enjoyed*. Hallward says that will is “equally opposed to mere imagination and wish”, for it realizes itself only through struggle or praxis ([5], p. 107). Again, if the emergence of national consciousness is an emergence that makes the will of the people appear as such, and in so doing, no doubt replaces a politics of recognition with the necessity of action, why does Fanon present that emerging through the languages of neurotic breakdown and (engine) failure, that is, in discontinuous or excessive terms that cannot be totalized as voluntaristic? And if “colonial mind-control [Hallward’s term for Fanonian “imposition”] removes even the fantasy of emancipation”, are we to assume that fantasy is to be excluded from the people’s will, and in ways that are necessarily without art, poesis or theater? Such statements about Fanon’s relation to a psychoanalysis of the state of being a Negro only serve to render Hallward’s interpretation of Fanon questionable from the start.

The first decision, then, already pushes Fanonian analysis towards a certain internal opposition or diremption: in the history of the colony Hallward wants to say that impulse, dream, wish, imagination, and fantasy have all been hijacked, and that hijacker is colonialism backed up by force. This focus motivates Hallward's second decision, which looks even more reductive than the first. Quoting from *Black Skin, White Masks* where Fanon is critiquing colonial psychiatry to underpin his *political* response to its ideology, Hallward quickly assimilates this critique of psychiatry to the more obvious remark that given that colonialism is "rooted more in coercion than in deference... it is thus easier to judge and condemn", and goes on to make the point, a point that illustrates how a certain existential heritage can skew the understanding of Fanon's acute reading of psychoanalysis, that "colonial and racist forms of oppression thereby lend themselves to *conscious and thus deliberate* or "voluntary" resistance" ([5], p. 110, my emphases). The voluntaristic interpretation of racism suppresses the repressed and projected elements which Fanon attributes to negrophobia in favour of a reassuring interpretation of exterior "mind-control" which readers of Fanon ought to be the first to be suspicious of. It is here that an extraordinary slippage occurs: to produce a politics of will Fanonism has to be purified, as it were, of its ongoing concern with unconscious mimicry, the emotions and signs by which the subject is submerged in racialized 'life': will can only be performed when act and gesture are in unity, it cannot allow its own (psychic) deviation to be seen, without compromising its own revolutionary potential.

Where is that reading to be found in Fanon's works? In the fact that the "only appropriate response to such feelings [of angst, phobia, anxiety, *etc.*]" is "in direct confrontation and struggle" (understood quite problematically by Hallward as violence) ([5], p. 110); and on the other as the articulation of a will to self-realization as an *act in a drama*. The first presentation has will perform the role of catharsis in the psyche once subjected by colonialism; the second must have will itself as the drama, in that through it the people learn to perform themselves as a people in a political "as opposed to a merely psychological" sense ([5], p. 111). This is Fanon's greatest political insight according to Hallward, which he later defines as "the conversion of an involuntary passivity into a self-mastering activity", and one which postcolonial studies supposedly cannot think within its disciplinary setup. All these phrasings suggest that *volonté*, in accordance with the famous mirror metaphor that Fanon uses to open *Black Skin, White Masks*, is the *inversion* of petrification: *volonté* consists in converting petrified culture into animation or, at least, a self-mastering movement. To define this movement as will or sovereignty (thus rendering continuous or foundational that which is presented as without foundation) is to confuse invention with a politics, or a certain language of organization: to try to find the sources of invention in sovereignty or nationhood is to fall back in line with what *limits* it, with what defines it as a meaning *already read*: invention thus becomes the staging of a drama whose meanings precede it.

The peremptoriness with which these oppositions are run together should give us pause. It is not difficult to see that this presentation of Fanon is based on a mirage. Hallward sees a problem in a postcolonial account by (1) assuming that the description of will-as-self-mastery is Fanon's political *definition*; (2) de-psychoanalysing mastery; (3) assuming that the emergence of the people's will must be thought of as the appearing of sovereignty as such; (4) being surprised to find that *willing* for Fanon is not what grounds but what *haunts* the subject, passive or not. These arguments only have any purchase if one is assuming, in existential style, that resistance is or could be a matter of coercion or consent. But any reading of Fanon should be sufficient to show that *no* concept of resistance can attain

to the value of “self-mastery”, and that this situation is psychologically ordinary. To that extent, however interesting the notion of political will may be to Fanonism, and however pressing the question of emancipation may be to Fanon or any other decolonial thinker, it can never arbitrarily decide this problematic of resistance, as Hallward attempts to do so through his claims about passivity and mastery. In a gesture which also informs his readings of Lenin, Hallward wants to force the whole philosophical argumentation of Fanon through the prism of political will: the fact that he then goes on to characterize that will in terms which are very far from Fanon’s own thinking on invention does not alter the fact that his first gesture commits him to a certain decisionism *about* revolution, and this leads to his confident identification of the people’s will as the name for a problem which he *also* recognizes does not go beyond any traditional determination of that concept. The curious effect of this is that a compelling, and at times urgent account of political will is presented in tandem with a set of claims about coercion, impulse, and compulsion as though all these claims happened on the same level of the ‘political’. The upshot of this, in contrast to Fanon, who shows how invention is, from the start, never simply performed as a politics, Hallward continues to think of will as the privileged form of political performance. At any rate, it is hardly possible to overlook the absence of psychoanalysis from the discussion, down to the very formulation of political will: Fanon, quite consistently, finds that a psychoanalytical reading of black identity leads to “a zone of nonbeing” inaccessible to identity as such, an “utterly naked declivity” that cannot but suspend any teleology or politics ([1], p. 10). And it is from this zone that a radical appeal to the future begins but in the absence of any piety or nostalgia, method or program. This much is certain: of all of Fanon’s figures for failure, this zone can never be a ground for self or propriety, and to that extent it cannot be thought of in terms of self-present mastery. What has been forgotten—and this insight affords us another avenue of access to Fanon’s work—is identity cannot be affirmed as the meaning of any ground whatsoever. Similarly, Hallward’s reading of Fanonism as a voluntarism, and the animus against psychoanalysis that appears to go along with it, is curious, but sets up an uncompromising scene that is already announced by the notion of will.

This is why, in regard to Fanon, we can no longer speak of sovereignty as the founding of a subject. And yet, for Hallward: “No less than Rousseau, Fanon is confident that if the people are free to deliberate and settle on their own course of action, then sooner or later they will solve the problems they face (or in Rousseau’s more emphatic terms, if the circumstances allow for a universal or general will, if a group is indeed able to sustain a single and undivided will, then such willing *will never err*). Determination of the popular will may take time, but in the end it is the only reliable way of getting things right” ([5], p. 112, my emphases). This allusion to Rousseau is odd: if the popular will of the people never errs, why is Rousseau keen to point out that sovereignty inevitably errs in its effort to be itself, and that from the outset, it is inherently corruptible? This comes about in almost a logical way. If sovereignty remains only itself, inalienable, indivisible, it would not even be sovereign “insofar as its will would find no possibility of execution” [6]. If the sovereign is a relation to itself “(to itself as to the law)” it cannot exist prior to this relation, since it is the relation that constitutes it, but it is precisely this non-coincidence that makes the will to be sovereign open to deviation or failure ([7], p. 99).

In this way Hallward’s text therefore errs at the very moment that the possibility of “getting things right” in the name of will is seen to sustain the comparison of Fanon and Rousseau. This is not so much the reason for, as evidence of, the extent to which Hallward has a mistaken view of Fanon’s relation to Rousseau. But if will is what separates the voluntary from the merely mechanical, or the

natural from the artificial (to use Rousseau's terms), and all in terms of acts in a political drama, what is will if not this artifice, or mechanism, that is needed to distinguish the rightful sovereign act from the act that errs sovereignly? If this question is valid, this would mean that erring is will and will erring, and only by erring can the will of the people realize itself as will. The will of the people can only return to itself as *self*-present after a delay, or deferral, it can only *perform* itself as a people insofar as 'the people' is exterior to, and comes to supplement, its own will. As soon as there is anything politically like the people's will, the people itself errs passively (since what defines it is just the suspended possibility of the sovereign constitution of itself as a people). Or, in Fanonian terms, the people's will is, in the initial moment of its constitution, neither passive or active—nor, involuntary or voluntary—but the consecution of what limits it: the violence that is at once biological and rhetorical, ecstatic and mystical (and one that leads, moreover, to the abolition of individuality); revolutionary spontaneity, in short, is what founds the difference between popular will and sovereignty. (In the chapter on "Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness", from *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon memorably argues that there is always a "time-lag, or a difference in rhythm", between the work of the party and the revolutionary spontaneity of the people ([3], p. 85). Thus the political organization of the people's will is not necessarily what carries it over—theatrically, performatively—into sovereignty.) Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish between the force that petrifies and canalizes from the force—the violence—that causes the people's will to authorize itself as a de-petrification. It is precisely this passivity of the people vis-a-vis its own capacity to actively will that makes Hallward's essay feel so arbitrary. The need to isolate will from spontaneity paradoxically requires that we exclude the *revolutionary* spontaneity of will from the institution of sovereignty. What remains to be seen is how 'will' can indeed count as a form of knowing the world or acting in it, how it can lend validity to the kinds of judgment that Hallward calls "self-mastering"? Hallward's political will is nothing if not sure of itself; but how can that certainty be asserted as universally binding of a people for a people? What is it that literally precipitates a decolonial people into being, to will itself sovereign? Fanon's answer is unequivocal: revolutionary violence. But the complexity of this term is often lost sight in the conventional readings of his work. Strangely enough, when Fanon reflects on executive power in the colony his point of departure is not right but colonialism's inherent violence and perversity, traceable from subjects to institutions; the word 'perversity' suggests that sovereignty in the colony amounts to brutish mastery from the outset for it entails a *jouissance* that is far away from politics and law but necessarily executes itself as such. Indeed, this perverse mastery is invariably responsible for the "nightmarish" return of the wretched, who appear as the horrible and monstrous realization of the master's own repulsive servility. Such perversity, incidentally, lends support to Fanon's notion that colonial mastery is not sovereignty and, by virtue of its history, racial slavery is not slavery as philosophically understood. The puzzle with Hallward is that he never undertakes a reading of this despite his insistence on political will as freedom. The oddity of his account is therefore that he understands that as soon as there is will, there is possibility, whereas for Fanon racism forces on the colony an *originary* deviation which is already there at the origin of political possibility, but which only appears *afterwards*, *nachträglich*, as a kind of hallucinatory catastrophe.

Hence the turn to invention as *tabula rasa* in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that moment when, "without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution" of one "species" of men by another, and the whole social structure is "changed from the bottom up" ([3], p. 35). "The

extraordinary importance of this change”, Fanon continues, is that it is “willed, called for, demanded” ([3], p. 35). Here if anywhere would have been the place to lay open basic aspects of Fanon’s thinking on the revolutionary moment as will. For Fanon, the tabula rasa is a radically democratic moment fraught with both danger and hope. (Fanon was evidently not willing to be responsible for when this moment might arrive although he was at the same time aware of a call for a reinvention, an untimeliness that is not itself yet political or sovereign.) Is a nonsovereign form of politics possible? It would be interesting to know whether Fanon conceived of the wretched as this politics, that is, as the presence exposing the void defining modern politics as such.

The question of what the tabula rasa means has been discussed from all sides since Fanon’s death; it would have been logical to pause here. Of course, this would have taken some soul-searching on the part of the author. What Hallward forgets is that the tabula rasa is the figure of an endlessly supplementary rewriting of what is decidable, rather than the unifying stroke of a revolutionary act. The dynamic of the tabula rasa will thus be the dynamic of substitution—and thereby the revolutionary moment as non-proper-supplementarity—in general. That Hallward doesn’t grasp this is shown by the passages in which he undertakes to interpret Fanon’s work or his style. Now this moment or tabula rasa, which is no doubt the key to Fanon’s thinking about politics, is in fact a rigorous consequence of the quasi-concept of the *leap*, at least as developed through the Sorelian motifs of *Wretched of the Earth* in 1963. There, Fanon famously claims that: “Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder” ([3], p. 36). And the abyssal structure of the relation of disorder to the tabula rasa is such that the presentation of disorder has always already begun *and* never stops arriving, and that no revolution escapes this. It is just this dissimulated (ghostly) presentation of erasure which determines the analysis of revolution from what I am calling here a nonsovereign politics of invention.

This thinking about tabula rasa has some startling consequences. For it is not enough to stress that undecidability is a condition of decision, or radical possibility (and therefore unpredictability), for the mobilization of the masses during the war of liberation nonetheless occurs, and must occur, and where it occurs it is quite determinate. Fanon will say that “The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man’s consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history” ([3], p. 93). But if mobilization lifts the colonized out of the condition of being petrified on the one hand, on the other hand the same mobilization must interrupt the very thing that is its condition of possibility, the place of sovereignty itself. Radicalizing this thought about events in general in the context of liberation leads to a *reinscription* of the concept of a people away from the concept of sovereign will to which it is traditionally bound. For if the people are the demiurge that has to invent itself in this way, then the traditional way of thinking about mass mobilization can be said to neutralize just what makes that invention an event by referring to it as a sovereign event. That said, Fanon is not always consistent on this matter. As we shall see, his faith in the urgency of insurrection sometimes centers on decision (whereas his presentation of the tabula rasa should in fact commit him to the view that the masses have to both perform and invent themselves in the event of indecision). The fact that this is what the wretched show should not be lost sight of; invention is the stage on which “the people” can be both resuscitated and shattered, and precisely because it is not easy to be freed from the contagion of petrification. So when Hallward argues that “temporality of political will is more fundamentally a matter of constancy and accumulation than it is

of transformative instants or leaps”, he tends to reduce the eventhood of invention by referring it to something outside of itself, and this means the people can no longer affirm itself via the uncertainty that is the structure of every decision ([5], p. 119). On this view, the decision to be a people is taken by the people’s own most sovereign decision, but they cannot be inventive if they are already taken to be some self-coincident mobilization, they can only be decisive if there is an invention that makes an exception, a liberation, sovereignly. This is why Fanon writes that the war of liberation must not be seen as “an act of heroism [*i.e.*, something sacrificial] but as a continuous, sustained action, constantly being reinforced” ([4], p. 151). Moreover, why, contra Hallward, Fanon’s thinking of sovereignty should not be reduced to its traditional concept of self-identity where, citing Rousseau, sovereignty, “being nothing more than the general will, can never be alienated” and “can only be represented by itself”. Hallward, describing this as Fanon’s “neo-Jacobin logic”, writes: “As far as the active *willing* of the popular will is concerned, there is no substitute or representative who might take the place of the people themselves”; and “the will of the people, where one exists, not only demands but incarnates an immediate and unconditional sovereignty” ([5], p. 120). I cannot here unpack the many sleights of hand and displacements in these two statements. Suffice it to say, if the people already knows itself to be self-identical it never decides about anything, and must remain indifferent even to the decision to be anything but itself, passive even to its own decision to be sovereign, and certainly not worthy of the name invention as Fanon thinks it. Getting things right may be more urgent for instituting law and justice, but this is already a bastardization of the pure revolutionary moment which is never entirely right or timely, insofar as this moment never really happens as such without erring. When one turns to Fanon, and especially those pages in *Wretched of the Earth* describing the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity, one reads: “the people legislates, finds itself, and wills itself to sovereignty” ([3], p. 132). The act of legislation may give rise to the people as self-identical and self-authorizing, but this is quite different from the moment of absolute substitution and unpredictability when the ‘people’ does not yet coincide with itself, and is yet to write or author itself as sovereign. In fact, Fanon is very insistent that the rebelliousness of the wretched is not to be limited to a political form that could re-produce it, but, in order that its spontaneity is precisely that which resists organization (in the sense of being a copy of the colonial power, or administered as such by the party), its emerging is scarcely a sovereign activity. Sovereignty cannot be achieved by merely willing it do so, but it does involve holding in tension the paradox that the leap is both the possibility and ruin of politics (as a sovereign decision or legislation). To leap is to find oneself in this moment of creative indecision or danger, that is to say suspended over an abyss where law is no longer acknowledged or recognizable. Going back to the tabula rasa: here we have, as Fanon first saw in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is an opening that is formless, that is not yet law or justice, but which, nevertheless, remains their horizon or condition. The tabula rasa is not so much opposed to sovereignty as at work already *in* sovereignty as its principle of failure and affirmation. It does not disappear with sovereignty but continues to haunt every structure of decision. In order to find, to will or eventise itself as a people means that it can only do so if sovereignty holds itself short of itself, so as to invent itself; or, as Fanon puts it: in the world in which I travel, I endlessly create myself.

A further consequence has to do with violence. And here we turn to Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence*, first published in 1908 [8]. Unlike Arendt, who badly misreads this text and Fanon’s relation to it, I think that there are some interesting convergences still to be explored between Fanon and Sorel (see [9]). In this brief, infamous text, designed to awaken “within every man a metaphysical fire”; and

committed to “liberating the spirit of invention”; “it is this spirit of invention which it is, above all, necessary [argues Sorel] to arouse in the world” of his readers ([8], p. 7). Violence emerges as an issue in this text because of the structure of invention: the moment when liberation remains more or less violently unstable within the bourgeois *institutions* of thought and of politics, and when invention more or less violently, but always violently, opens up the subject and the state to destabilization and collapse. Or, violence is redemptive of what Sorel calls “decadence”. Without confrontation (violence) there is no revolutionary identity; the revolutionary identity of the masses requires conflict for their constitution. Violence, according to Sorel, is not only terrifying, dizzyingly sublime, and irreversible, it is also the “pure and simple manifestation of the sentiment of class struggle” ([8], p. 17). And so, any attempt to dilute, reduce, or even regulate that conflict can only be an instrument of decadence and a corruption of the revolutionary proletariat. Nor is this all. Between proletarian violence and the parliamentary parties there is no compatibility (they do not co-exist on the same plane); the former stands apart, separate, necessarily opposed to the oppressive force of the state and the parties’ reformist tendencies.

Now this proletarian violence, which is constitutively split between, on the one hand, a syndicalist demand, and, on the other, the incarnation of a social “grandeur”, has in fact a rigorous consequence for Sorel’s thinking of sovereignty. In *Reflections*, grandeur and decadence do not have intrinsic contents of their own, but are the signifiers of an *energy* understood as an opposition between movement, force, and violence on the one hand, and decadence, incapacity, and stupefaction on the other (it is not by chance that the class struggle is seen as the restitution of energy whereas parliamentary politics is seen as the “*dictatorship of incapacity*” ([8], p. 73)). Revolutionary proletarian violence (insofar as it stems from this *Trieb* or restorative life force) is thus paradoxically both destructive *and* conserving: whereas decadence is opposed to life, and drowns it in a morass of stupefaction, the function of class struggle is to induce capitalism’s historical perfection, and, as such, is directly linked to the workings of civilization rather than that of barbarism ([8], p. 85). (Needless to say, Fanon does not share this language of energetics, nor does he reduce the work of invention to that of European civilization.) Sorel famously claims that the revolutionary myth (of the general strike) is the expression of a “will to act”, and, as such, does not reveal a latent meaning, but consists in a challenge to the symbolic itself as a representation of meaning: myth is what allows the proletariat to capture and observe itself as the image of a revolutionary process or *movement* ([8], p. 28). In *Wretched*, by contrast, Fanon famously claims that the wretched are the “*grangrene at the heart of the colony*”, they are both the grandeur and the corruption, the grandeur that is corruption, and without one’s being able to separate them except by abstraction, and the violence that they introduce into existence cannot be separated from their contents even though the latter cannot be determined or willed into the form of a “*deliberate transformation*” (to use Hallward’s words) ([5], p. 126). For Sorel, any attempt by the proletariat to constitute itself as an integrated subject can only lead to decadence; for Fanon, the wretched are the part that has no part, the included exclusion, the trace of otherness as such. For Sorel, each action of the workers—whether a strike, a demonstration, or a factory occupation—should be seen, not in its own specificity and particular objectives, but as part of a chain of events in the formation of the revolutionary will. Accordingly, the general strike is totally heterogeneous with the empirical world of limited and partial struggles. The general strike is presented as a myth (of actuality): its form or function is not to be judged by its political effectiveness, nor is it compressible to

mere means or ends; on the contrary, the point of its advance is not the representation (of shared interests) but of a kind of secular revelation that is *intuitive, immediate, spontaneous*, and one whose articulation could not possibly correspond to any actual historical event. The proletarian general strike is not—or is not merely—a political event; it is a radical nonevent that is, paradoxically, the condition of all events if there is going to be a revolutionary grandeur in society. The problem with this approach is that the proletarian myth (as the metaphor of energy) is always the signifier of an encounter that is itself fundamentally mythical. In this antimony, proletarian violence is always the mirror of its bourgeois opposite so as the better to reveal its degradation, the decadence of its inertia, and its caricature of life. The attempt to ground revolutionary spontaneity in myth thus ends in a specifically bourgeois myth of decadence and failure, and one that borrows from physiology a certain (class) energetics of passion and of life. Proletarian violence has to affirm life's *moral* limits for, if myth is the metaphor for what separates reality from the real (of revolution), what makes myth authoritative is paradoxically what abolishes its cogency as grandeur: grandeur, by definition, is always usurped by the moral emptiness of the mythic. For Fanon, the mobilization of the wretched is an event or a decision that is radically unpredictable and entails a beginning that is irreducibly violent, and one that leads to a “total, complete, and absolute substitution”, or *tabula rasa* ([3], p. 35). In this respect, his notion of violence is closer to that of Benjamin's “Critique of Violence” [10]. That is to say, its appearance is what fissures, or disturbs, the law of the racist state, and by precisely calling into doubt the fantasies and fetishes that conserve it, including the myths that are, as it were, their concrete abstraction and affirmation.

In fact then, what is at stake in Fanon's reflections on violence is not mythic violence but the effective violence of myth in the civilization of racial images. The analysis of decolonial struggle in *Toward the African Revolution*, for example, distinguishes three levels of violence: an originary ‘metaphysical’ appropriation of the colony (first level) is violently organized into effects of propriety (in this instance by the racial classification of being, law, and property—second level), which can then be violently disclosed (third level) at the level of hegemony. In short, violence has a hold over all *social* relations in the colony; all pleasure and knowledge is bound to it, and no language, law, memory, or desire is safe from its presence or enunciation.

But perhaps more importantly for thinking about politics, *Toward the African Revolution* establishes, apparently against what can appear a fanatic purity in Sorel, an economy of violence within anti-colonialism itself (again this flows directly from Fanon's thought of the wretched as the image of revolutionary spontaneity, and of the party bureaucracy as “what shows itself opposed to any innovation” ([3], p. 99)). This leads Fanon to pose (to propose) a final transformation of politics as means and ends, *i.e.*, that of a bloody intensification, a *jouissance* of armed struggle that calls into doubt the classical determinations of politics, *i.e.*, reformism, classism, racialism, vitalism, *etc.* It stems from the fact that the wretched cannot be satisfied by these political meta-languages, or at least that they call into doubt the reduction of insurrection to a politics. Whereas in Hallward's reading, the power to resist is a capacity, and revolution is the organized will to resist domination, for Fanon (and as we shall see shortly, for C.L.R. James), organization is *both* what secures and thereby ruins mass spontaneity as innovation. As a type of violence, spontaneity also suggests something like a pure, irreducible event not retrievable by any aggregation, program, history, or will; it is a wretchedness that exceeds any preconstituted identity, and, as such, cannot be thought as intended or willed. This

means that violence, for Fanon, is not the redemption of politics, nor is it its continuation by other means, but what organizes decolonialism—its intensifying movement—into a single signifying practice. The distance separating this vision from, say, that of Sorel's is more than historical: the mythic grandeur of political violence cannot be thought other than through the teleological perspective of non-violence. Or, in the greatest times of social division the political value of violence increases to the extent to which the coming of socialist democracy promises to reverse its need and necessity. Significantly, Fanon's political philosophy is not wedded to this teleological scheme in which, as Geoff Bennington reminds us, "political philosophy is always the philosophy of the end of politics, or that the metaphysical concept of politics is the concept of politics *ending*" ([11], p. 203). In fact, Fanon's thinking of the liberatory leap disallows this teleological scheme, or at least refuses to mimic it to the extent that the intensification of violence must be understood here as a kind of *jouissance*, bound neither to its diminishing nor to its consumption (as sovereignty, or political organisation). The history of political philosophy as telos or will can only see such intensification in terms of what completes it rather than what gives it expression. Fanon's texts are very much a focus on its necessary invention as an event: it asks of the reader to enter the depths, to take a step, where the reinvention of the subject can no more be willed than it can be purified of its endless contamination by what seizes and renders it (in its racialized conformity) unreadable and so beyond recognition.

5. The Leap

"If ever a leaper was well-prepared we are."

C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics*

All this becomes more visible if we compare Fanon's thinking of the leap with C.L.R. James's extraordinary analysis of Hegel's *Logic* in *Notes On Dialectics* (1948) [12]. As in Fanon's texts, in *Notes* James also turns to the figure of the leap to think the discontinuities, disruptions, and anomalies between invention and politics (as traditionally understood), and this not by virtue of some metaphysical appeal but by the *logic* or *algebra* of resistance: like Fanon, James is concerned to ensure that revolutionary invention continues beyond the impasses of sovereignty. This short text, presented as little more than a series of "notes" on the *Science of Logic* and the history of the labor movement, shows how the "true significance" of Hegel's dialectic, by which spirit both grounds itself and is itself this movement, entails a necessary *leap*, a figure that James takes from Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks*, written during the latter's 1914 sojourn in Zurich. In one marginal comment to the section of the *Logic* on "Quality in the Doctrine of Being", Lenin writes: "LEAP LEAP LEAP LEAP". The series of notes by James on Lenin's marginalia is significant:

The new thing LEAPS out. You do not look and see it small and growing larger. It is there, but it exists first in thought. Thought knows it is the object. You haven't to see it (though if you know it is there you can see signs and point them out). Hegel is bored to tears at people who keep looking for external signs and "the mere magnitudinal" as proof. Lenin did not fasten on this for nothing... He didn't have to wait to see anything. That was there. It would LEAP up... ([12], p. 100).

Lenin's marginalia to Hegel becomes in James's *Notes* a launch pad for a series of further "leaps" or "jumps": from philosophy to history (that is to say, from Hegel's *Logic* to a history of labor); from Marxist political philosophy to actual politics (or what can reasonably be seen as a tension between the party and the labor movement, involving an ongoing dialectic between the organization and administration of working life and the free creative spontaneity of labor); and from history to dialectics. The failure of most Marxist political philosophy to *see* (in the sense of *theoria*) the ongoing tension between political organization and revolutionary spontaneity has led almost inevitably, in James' view, to a *fixed* view of the labor movement as an object of theory (rather than the object of a new radical politics). This view, attributed to a certain dogmatism, has to be resisted for it prevents Marxists from seeing the critical importance of bureaucracy *and* the West's imperialist legacy.

It's no coincidence that James should seek to present this leap by returning to Marxist philosophical history—namely, its origins in Hegel—and, in particular, to the *Logic*, a text that he insists needs to be understood here as a kind of algebra that, aside from Lenin, Marxist theory has been deprived of in its concern with finite political organization. These emphases are at the heart of *Notes on Dialectics* as both a philosophical text and a philosophy of dialectical reading. James' commentary on Hegel is thus not so much historicizing as a transcendental critique of the culture of Marxism as a politics. That is to say, in order to grasp the new thing as it leaps up, Marxist philosophy must itself set aside the officially recognized history of Marxism, the history of its reading, so as to not to exclude the very thing that constitutes it: the dialectic as presented in Hegel, and the creative spontaneity—or revolutionary leaps—of labor. Posed in historical terms the question would therefore be: What happens when, in Marxism, theory passes over into dogmatism? What happens when Marxist political theory becomes *fixed*, not in the sense that it thinks it knows the object and assigns itself the task of a reflection or meditation on such knowledge, but in the sense that political philosophy itself, as such, would be instituted, determined, and presented according to the *blind(ing)* logic and form of a "fetishistic" discourse and reading practice? In the sense, then, in which Marxist political philosophy would be *legitimated* fetishistically. What would be the stakes, the nature and the validity of this operation, which goes beyond anything that we might term a dialectical philosophy? What then of philosophy? What then of dialectics?

Such questions might seem a little abstract, but posed in terms of the history of the labor movement, they suggest that organization *as such* is always usurpatory with respect to spontaneity (which is in principle an impulse or leap: "We have insisted upon the fact that the proletariat always breaks up the old organization by impulse, a leap: remember that" ([12], p. 117). (It is worth noting here that James uses the very same terms to talk about slave rebellion in *The Black Jacobins*; namely, as a kind of caesura within the various traits of plantation culture.) This *Trieb* or leap is labor's essential movement and should be considered separate from organization as a philosophy and a politics: "But there comes a stage when organization and the maintenance of the organization become ends in themselves in the most perfect conflict with the essential movement of the proletariat" ([12], p. 117)). Organization is already a usurpation of spontaneity only because spontaneity is from the start a little less than spontaneous, is *driven*, by definition, by a desire to realize itself (as a theoretical object and subject of history), but is thereby also wanting or failing, just because it needs a political organization to represent it in the first place to supplement itself and secure itself as a politics. A proletariat that remained essentially itself, as a purely instantaneous self-coincident identity, would not *even be*

proletariat, insofar as its *Trieb* would find no essential movement as a politics, and it would therefore do nothing but remain an inessential appearance, a mere reflection of capitalism. In order to be spontaneous at all, then, the proletariat has to submit to being organized, and give itself an executive arm or branch in the form of a party, but then the proletariat necessarily has to grasp that its legitimacy does not come from the party but from its own revolutionary spontaneity. “If the free activity of the proletariat is to emerge”, James writes, “it can emerge only by destroying the communist parties” ([12], p. 118). The proletariat must be freed from the organization of the party in order to be itself. Lenin’s “*thought* made that leap in 1914” when he dispensed with the figure of the vanguard ([12], p. 137), but Trotsky (and Stalin) “converted it [organization] into a fetish” (via a kind of abstract form of Understanding) and one that is essentially bureaucratic ([12], p. 89). It is to counter the “unreasoning obstinacy” of Marxist thought, still tied to outmoded categories, that James returns to Hegel’s *Logic* ([12], p. 33).

The issue is a double one, therefore, and doubly heterogeneous. If Marxism is to leap (historically, philosophically), it must return to the Leninist question of labor and spontaneity; if Trotskyism and Stalinism is the dissolution of the dialectic, party bureaucracy is now the *philosophical* question of Marxism. I want to try and broach this question by explaining as briefly as possible this reciprocal implication as a question of reading, as we see James take various leaps or jumps through Hegel’s *Logic* and Marxist philosophical history. To the extent that the latter has always been a dialectic between capital and labor and/or organization and spontaneity, James asserts that a newer version of that dialectic will now have to be accounted for by examining the limits of party politics in and of itself.

Notes on Dialectics is James’ attempt to flesh out this complex of history and party, of how that “which arises or passes away” (the words are Hegel’s) is often mistaken for “the mere changing of an external distinction” instead of an intrinsic leap or transition whose meaning gathers up past, present and future as it unfolds dialectically (*cf.* [12]). A consistent argument of the *Notes* is that the history of the labor movement needs to be understood in terms of Hegel’s *Logic*, whose algebraic movement has been misread as a series of fixed repetitions or oppositions, the trace of which remains a sort of political and theoretical impasse. That algebra, whose analysis, today, is “centred on three names: Marx (and Engels), Lenin, and Trotsky”, allows James to grasp the relation between these three (actually four) names and a view of the labor movement and of the party (as typified by Stalin and Trotsky) that remains “frozen” and that cannot be maintained, insofar as a new differentially defined identity of the party and of the mass has emerged that is opposed to both the domination of the capitalist state and state bureaucracy. Whence the importance of Hegel’s *Logic*: for James, the “aim of the *Logic*” is “how to keep out of the fixed, limited, finite categories” ([12], p. 105); which is why the emergence of a new *concept* of the proletarian party proves what will have been the case, and also why the emergence of a new concept is always a retrospective assumption of a causal sequence in a dialectical logic. If a break in traditional concepts means “We can find *ourselves* only by tearing off this trotskyist veil and seeing the leninist content” ([12], p. 147)—(the figure of a veil here is of some importance, as we shall see)—that break is nonetheless always presented in a way that is entirely consistent with traditional politics. This way of thinking the revolutionary moment therefore ends with a kind of dialectical resolution of invention, or free creative activity. Needless to say, this is a reading opposed to that of Fanon’s: for Fanon, revolutionary spontaneity, it perhaps needs recalling, is not

inherently redemptive, and is always entangled with other traits, some transitive, some gestural, opposed to invention and revolutionary transformation.

However, I want to suggest that this is not the only way in which James deals with the situation of invention or, in his own words, “the uncharted infinite that faces *us*” in spontaneous self-activity ([12], p. 135). The fact that the leap does not function as a final meaning but as that which produces certain revolutionary *effects*, leads James to read Lenin (on Hegel’s *Logic*) as an illustration of an historical dialectic that disallows historicism. The leap acts as a revolutionary signifier precisely to the extent that its function in the dialectic (of the party and the mass, organization and spontaneity) does not require that its meaning is revealed: such a revelation would be to limit, or fix it categorically. This may also account for why the leap calls for a singular typography and syntax, and a textual practice that makes it exemplary of an emphasis or gesture that only exists in writing. This emphasis is already located in James’ philosophical attempt to rethink the relations between bureaucracy and proletariat on the one hand, logic and history on the other, between what can be clearly demarcated as the “hard knots” of history and the proletarian revolution, “whose ultimate aim is self-mobilization” (no doubt linked here to its opposite, “developing capitalist society”, or capital as a form of organization), an emphasis which allows James to grasp how each term “contains and overcomes its complete penetration by its inherent antagonism, the capital relation” ([12], p. 10). In *Notes on Dialectics*, James insists on how this dual (if interpenetrated) contradiction is from the start affected by a *third* element. A central element here is the future status of the party under Stalin which, James argues, has to be negated. “Unless the labour movement arrives at the abolition of the party, the state will never wither away” ([12], p. 11). Clearly, what is at stake here is how the hard knot of these 2 elements (which is really a 3) already contains new transitions, or leaps, but ones that are misrecognized as such. These transitions must themselves be grasped historically, dialectically. Crucial here is James’ “method” (his word) of reading: to read dialectically is to go beyond the finite categories of thought and action precisely because historic events cause “violent changes” in those categories (N: 17). Trotsky’s great error, according to James, was to “*begin* by believing that you *know* that categories change” ([12], p. 18). Trotsky lectured on changing categories all the time, he says, but “fixed and finite determinations held him by the throat until the end” ([12], p. 18). The point about reading dialectically is that “we establish a category only to break it up. That is the point. You no sooner have it fixed than you must at once crack it wide open. In fact the chief point about a finite category is that it is not finite” ([12], p. 47). At another point James defines his theoretical task as: “We have to co-relate logic and history. We have to search and find the specific categories, the specific finite and infinite. If you jump at it abstractly, then you will be betrayed as sure as day” ([12], p. 183). This is why James’ text is riddled with a constant series of ironic exhortations to the reader (and why it sometimes addresses itself to specific readers, some named (Grace Lee) and some not (Constance Webb; members of the Johnson-Forest Tendency; the second person pronoun)). Any attempt to fix or limit the meaning of Lenin or Hegel’s text (and presumably James’) is precisely why in each of these instances the effects of transition must be presented as a constant oscillation between paraphrase and quotation, irony and exhortation, note and marginalia, upper case and lower case, finite and infinite, logic and history, without the transition itself being paraphrased or fixed.

In contrast to Fanon therefore, who explicitly refuses to reduce the revolutionary leap to history or politics, James’ *Notes* addresses the *political* demand to free spontaneity—“the free creative activity of

the proletariat”—from the repressive forces of organization that have historically *capitalized* it: forces that include nationalism and imperialism, Trotskyism and Stalinism, but also capitalism more generally. Indeed, it is to distinguish the international proletariat from the imperialist form of capital and the Stalinist one-party state that James articulates the leap as an “impulse” or *Trieb* at work in the body politic. This drive cannot fail to be usurped by bourgeois politics (the era of the French and Russian revolutions and the various Internationals), and this usurpation is itself the product of a failure of Marxist political philosophy to grasp how Stalinist political bureaucracy has become “the enemy of the very thing it had been formed to develop”: revolutionary spontaneity ([12], p. 116). The “essence of Leninism” is to have explored the diremption between “organization” and “*the corresponding stage* of its opposite, spontaneity” ([12], p. 116). Accordingly, Lenin’s four leaps or capitals mark the appearance of a new dialectic: “*The Party and Revolution*. That is our leap”, writes James: an axiom that adds two more capitals to Lenin’s four and which, to put it bluntly, signals the emergence of a dialectic which casts a new light on the issue of spontaneity, discussed here in relation to state capitalism and bureaucracy, as well as the legacies of Stalin, Lenin, and Trotsky ([12], p. 180). Bureaucracy (which is the true fate of modern party politics) thus carries within it what is really at stake in the failure to separate invention from that which limits or negates it.

The stakes of this reading can be shown schematically in the following two motifs:

- (1) Lenin’s reading of Hegel allows James to *speculate* beyond the party as a political category ([12], p. 8). The Introduction to *Notes* presents a history of labor from 1789 to the present day. In this account the transition from the First to the Third International is seen as a series of “hard knots”; these knots are composed of a unity of opposites which, as they evolve and develop, briefly coalesce until one element “overcomes the other, embraces it, and itself becomes the basis of...the new unity of further opposites”, whereupon another knot is formed ([12], p. 9). James argues very forcibly that in each historical epoch contradiction coalesces into a hard knot that consists of “two antagonistic elements locked together in a unity” (his primary examples are labor and capital), and it is only when Hegel’s Subject [with a capital S] grasps this contradiction that it “unlooses (in speculative thought) inherent movement”, whereupon another knot forms, and so on ([12], pp. 8–9). From the origin of the First International, which began in Marx, before the various internecine struggles of the Second, and Third Internationals saw a “decay in opportunistic groups with neither historical nor organizational perspective”, the history of the party, far from being regulated by the speculative truth of reason, seems, rather, to be deregulated by the finite and limited perspective of understanding (a true history of the labor movement can only open out on the basis of dialectic) ([12], p. 9). To this extent, the history of the labor movement, like Hegel’s *Logic*, is essentially composed of a series of transitions and oppositions that are in turn negated, or overcome, historically and dialectically. James puts it like this: “Truth, in our analysis, the total emancipation of labor, can only be achieved when it contains and overcomes its complete penetration by its inherent antagonism, the capital relation” ([12], p. 10).

So what is James’s leap? “*The Party and Revolution*. That is our leap. That is our new Universal—the abolition of the distinction between party and mass” ([12], p. 180). “All politics now therefore revolved around this leap” ([12], p. 142). Insofar as the party is “the

consciousness” of the proletariat, the primary contradiction has historically been “between *its* consciousness and its being” ([12], p. 59). The “conflict of the proletariat is [therefore] between itself as object and itself as consciousness, its party”, and the solution of this conflict is “the fundamental abolition of this division” ([12], p. 61). The mass, in order to be the revolutionary proletariat, has to give itself a primary supplement in the form of a political party, and that party cannot fail to undo that creative movement in the very fact of making it a politics, or to undermine it in the very fact of organizing it. The very impulse that drives the proletariat to establish itself as an essential movement and thereby a subject in history entails opening itself up to usurpation and eventual destruction as a revolutionary movement. (These remarks on spontaneity are very similar to Fanon’s. For both thinkers, spontaneity and usurpation are one and the same movement: the leap introduces a new object and a new point of departure.) But how is the proletariat even to give itself executive power (a government or state) and yet itself hope to remain revolutionary and/or spontaneous? The proletariat is proletariat only insofar as it expresses an impulse or *Trieb* to fully realize itself (to discover its *notion* in Hegelian terms) in the very form of its politics. The proletariat ‘to a man’ cannot simply and self-identically *be* the party, because that would be the end of its historical inventiveness (and even the end of Marxism as a politics), and this is why, in *Notes*, James introduces Hegel’s *Logic* by way of a reading of Leninism as a political response to Trotskyism and Stalinism. The party, James writes, “‘had to be negated’ because in its current form (the one-party state) it represents ‘the incorporation into bourgeois, capitalist society of the nearly two-hundred-year-old efforts by the labour movement to create a party to take over the state. Instead the state takes over the party’” ([12], p. 11). Or, as he says later, in the section on “*The Leap*”, “bourgeois society has taken over the specific creation of the proletariat, the political party” ([12], p. 179). The history that James relates consists, accordingly, in rejecting the statist model of the party in favor of new forms of mass spontaneity. Unlike Trotsky, however, whom James accuses of being “caught up and strangled” by outmoded categories, he argues that “the character and perspectives of the revolutionary party and of the existing revolutionary party” have changed and are now profoundly Stalinist: “We know that stalinism today is the *true* state of the labour movement” ([12], pp. 35–36; 43). In this instance, Stalinism is the latest historical instance of the primary contradiction between organization and spontaneity, and one that will in turn be “the *means* whereby it [the labor movement] will move on” ([12], p. 64). Now, it is in precisely this regard that the figure of the leap is a question of reading before all else: the dialectical method “is the examination of an object in its changes and the examination of our concepts of that object, watching how *both* change, doing it consciously, clearly, with knowledge and understanding” ([12], p. 55). Reading dialectically becomes a matter of knowing that changes in the object also entails changes in the historical categories of reason—and here, no doubt, the very fact that reason has a history—because “truth is the concrete stage that the notion, the absolute, has reached, [in] actuality, but actuality in terms of the Idea” ([12], p. 51). Insofar as Trotsky failed to grasp this fact politically as well as theoretically, his judgment of Stalin, as “a usurper” distorting Leninist categories, remains abstract and static [12], p. 35).

- (2) Now, it is precisely Lenin’s 1914 reading of Hegel that shows James the importance of spontaneity as the very condition of the possibility of revolutionary politics: with this, we come

back to Lenin's four capitalizations of the word 'leap', at the very heart of Hegelianism as such. For example, not only did Lenin see that "every single one of his [Hegel's] transitions involves a leap", he saw how the drive to "self-movement [*eigenmachtige*]" was not only the core of Hegelianism, but also said something important about the political as such, insofar as it implies a *Trieb* that will always work against the unitary aspirations of organization, but also that its in the transitions—from the party to the mass say—that revolutionary movements emerge ([12], p. 100). For this reason, as much as Lenin uncovers this core and grasps or unveils its value as a politics (as much as his principles of organization presents spontaneity as an "internally necessary movement"), with this same gesture Lenin also suggests why organization falls permanently short as such, and why its institution inevitably, and continually, declines back as labor moves forward ([12], p. 101). In other words, since Leninism thinks itself—writes itself—in terms of the political necessity of organization, it inevitably thinks in a way that is structured around (or affected by) transitions, by leaps that are an intrinsic part of the drive to spontaneity within which organization continually takes place (and fails) as a politics. As James says, "the man of organization knew what moved the world... this was the drive, and it made LEAPS (four of them at once)" ([12], p. 101).

Leninism in James' thought occupies the same position as Hegel's *Logic*: as dialectical thinkers par excellence they allow James to avoid the errors of Trotskyism and/or Stalinism, or, as he says many times in *Notes*, they refuse the antimony of logic and being and dismiss the conceptual piety hiding behind certain notions of truth. If the Leninist discourse on Hegel is substituted for Trotsky's many failings, then this is because it's in Lenin, and on the basis of this, that Marxist philosophy sets about declaring itself as "something *vital*" ([12], p. 101). On the one hand, Lenin's four capitalizations or leaps become in James the three capitalizations of "leap", "spontaneous activity", and "self-movement", which are in turn taken to define "*the 'capitalizing' of the concept of the proletarian party*" (party in the sense of "the organized labour movement" ([12], pp. 103, 223). The leap, on this description, refers to an emergence that cancels and transforms notions of socialist time or history, and if this emergence is nonetheless small or unnoticed, its arrival is here the anticipation of a major change in quality (understood as specificity or singularity): the concept of the proletariat is now at a stage in which it has leapt ahead of old vanguardist notions of leadership, and this stage, which it already represents, makes it possible for James to see that it was always tending toward this end, as its very appearance has now proved. On the other hand, as it were *after* this capitalizing moment, James argues that Marxist political philosophy remains haunted by Leninist thought as defined by the Second and Third Internationals, and importantly by Leninism as a "thought on 'organization'" ([12], p. 89). This thought is articulated around a double structure, therefore: "that the truth of party consists in its relation with mass, the truth of organization consists in its relation to spontaneity... The one concept has life and movement *because of the opposition of the other*" ([12], p. 88). In brief, organization can only be understood insofar as it subsumes, or suppresses spontaneity; and spontaneity can only proceed *through* this suppression: in a sense, spontaneity exists insofar as it is always an impulse or *Trieb* sublated by organization. Organization is a kind of limit case of spontaneity—whence its deferred (non-self-coincident) character. This also suggests why "organization as we have known it is at an end. The task is to abolish organization" ([12], p. 117). According to James, the implications of these remarks have been either ignored or dismissed by Marxist political philosophy, insofar as it dismisses

Hegel and fails to see how the central motifs of Leninism are no longer suited to the present moment. And, in the section, “Review and Leninist Interlude”, these failings are summed up as a kind of internal or intrinsic inhibition, or restraint within Marxism as a politics: holding itself fast to previous existents (by a kind of conceptual piety or fetishism), Marxists (such as Trotsky and Schachtman) cannot see that organization “has served its purpose”, which is why “the present eludes them”, and why they can no longer read Hegel, or for that matter Lenin, for whom it is “not the finite, the fixed limited” which is real, for it is only “the Infinite which is real” ([12], pp. 103–04; 117). To this extent, and to the extent that the real is the political, its organization can only be finite and limited: rather than seeing Stalinism, therefore, as ‘in essence a fiction without reality’ (as Trotsky did), James sees it as “a stage in transition”, which involves an internally necessary movement ([12], pp. 104–05). Any reading of Hegel, however rigorous or superficial (however radical or conservative) must recognize these leaps, and this is why James, following Lenin, resorts to the singular writing down of that insistence. Hence the capitalization: but do the capital letters *make visible* what is historically unprecedented, or is it the emergence itself that calls out for emphasis? Or, again, is it the event that capitalizes time or is it its representation, that is, its impact on our reading or understanding? So: why capitalize movement? For Lenin, to signify and underline the following motif from the *Philosophic Notebooks* on the “gradualness of emergence” that, in the *Logic*, refers to the Understanding’s struggle to conceive of “the qualitative transition of something into its Other in general and into its opposite” (cited in [12], p. 100). “This is a passage”, writes James, “of great importance and Lenin has summarized it perfectly with his LEAP LEAP LEAP LEAP” ([12], p. 100). All of which explains why the decisive “new organization” today (post-1948) begins, for James, “with spontaneity, *i.e.*, free creative activity, as its necessity” ([12], p. 118). So far as the free activity of the proletariat is concerned, the communist parties must be “destroyed” (the foundation of the proletariat as free activity means “the end of the communist parties”), since only “free activity, a disciplined spontaneity, can prevent bureaucracy” ([12], p. 118). This non-coincidence of organization and spontaneity is what allows James to say that spontaneity is no longer the means to organization, but its end, a conclusion that also enables him to say that the workers no longer want to be delimited by the party “as concentrated mass” ([12], p. 119). As such, the spontaneity of labor cannot be organized as a politics and must remain unconditional against all finite thought or categories. For only then can it be truly inventive.

A key concern of *Notes on Dialectics* is therefore with what it means to know a limit, and what it means to be limited by that knowledge. By grasping the relation between logic and history, the finite and infinite, organization and spontaneity, we can thereby grasp the main political demand of James’ text: to understand why the relation between proletariat and the party, at least in the sense of the party as the executive power of the state, has been taken over by bureaucracy as the formal spirit of the state, and to see why the party, insofar as it is part of the spiritual form of administered life, is opposed to the sovereignty of the people *as* the state. Spirit (and therefore politics) emerges as the result of a hard knot between how the state is administered and the organization of the party, the knot whereby state formalism and bureaucracy is now a closed circle (“out of which no one can get”) and in whose universal semblance there is nothing but illusion, like a ghost haunting the real essence of illusion (*cf.* [13]). The essential upshot of James’ complication of the relation between bureaucracy and the state is that

politics has been transformed into a spiritual form of administration while guarding the mystery that is its secret, namely, the crass materialism of administered life.

Several consequences follow on from this. One, on which James is particularly insistent, is that the concept of the party in the form of the state gives rise to the bureaucratic *institution* of itself which, just because of its formal illusion, remains more or less passive and subordinate to bureaucratic offices and principles. How is this situation to be transcended? In the final section of *Notes on Practice*, James writes:

For our world, our socialized world, the party must be the organized labour movement...

The whole propaganda and agitation must evolve around the destruction of the bureaucracy
The *only* propaganda, the only theoretical principle of Marxism that is worth any attention,
is the analysis of the bureaucracy and why it should be destroyed...

It has been worthwhile writing this [the *Notes*] if only to settle for ourselves why, when we propose that the Fourth International orient itself around telling the workers that they alone, in every country, have the power to alter this and that alone by their own independent power—our most violent opponents are not the workers but the Trotskyists themselves ([12], pp. 223–24, 226).

Let us leave the entire question of propaganda hanging for the moment. The first thing to say here, in conclusion, is that James ends by repeating the failings of which he accuses Trotsky(ists): on the one hand, James' unequivocal demand for bureaucracy's destruction ends up being blind to how that demand, in its very elaboration, affirms prescription rather than dialectical possibility. It is just this prescriptiveness that causes James to confirm the illusory, abstract relationship between bureaucracy and the proletariat rather than grasping its interruptive and precipitate movement. And on the other hand, James' criticism of Trotskyism as a mere ornament, veiling, for a time, the true Marxist analysis of the labor movement, can only repeat that analysis in oppositional, rather than emergent, terms. The failure to think the relation here between ought and prescription, means that the demand itself is reduced to abstractedness. Thus it is perhaps not surprising to find that the true political significance of the *Logic* has itself to be finally signaled by (capitalized by?) propaganda in order to signal the emergence of a new concept (of the proletarian party) that is the focus of James' polemic here. The fact that James repeats the very gestures he is criticizing does not in itself invalidate his criticism of their *effects*, but it does problematize his statement condemning their *existence*. That said, if James' reading of Hegel thus ends as a kind of ought or *sollen*, what has been left out of these remarks is precisely the leap which subverts both the concept of the party as institution and the attempt to comprehend it as revolutionary spontaneity. The relation between invention and its institution is the key insight of the *Notes* despite the political urgency of James's own anti-Trotskyism. That said, the wish to impose definable frontiers on Marxist theory and politics is precisely what the revolutionary moment (as Fanon says repeatedly) puts into question. Where the two thinkers converge is via the comprehension of what remains infinitely undeterminable to institution but what remains radically instituted as such. For Fanon, as we have seen, the figure for this is a kind of endless inventiveness; in James, the infinitely finite leap is neither a strategy nor a program but a kind of irreducible residue or remnant within politics itself. For all the insistence on logic and teleology in *Notes on Dialectics*, the emergence of bureaucracy is presented as a singular, capitalizing, spiritual event that simultaneously suspends, defers, and limits the proletariat as a political condition or finite possibility. Indeed, if "the

next stage for the proletariat is the transcendence of the old political organizations of the proletariat”, that transcendence is evoked as the end of bourgeois form of the party *at the same time* as the originary instance of a dialectic whose form has yet to be historically determined ([12], p. 178). To illustrate this, consider the following passage from *Notes* discussing the determination of quality in the *Logic*:

Quality means that a *limit* is imposed, a *barrier* between itself and its other....Something “Becomes” out of nothing. It always has its limit, its barrier. And this limit, barrier, is burst through, at a certain stage to establish the other, its other ([12], p. 69).

James continues:

The proletariat politically is an undistinguished body of proletarians. Something “becomes”. Some of them form a party. At once the proletariat is no longer party and proletarians. It is party and non-party, or as we say, party and mass. The party creates its other, the mass ([12], p. 70).

It is this deceptively simple analogy which provides the core of James’ thinking about politics, and which, as we have already seen, leads to his radical rethinking of the party and the mass. (It also denotes a movement (as is also evident in Fanon) where the spirit of invention emerges as a violence within the limits of political organization.) Let us approach it through James’ analysis of quality, his fascination with the processes of both what limits and determines the proletariat as a mode of being, a situation which can be found in Lenin’s reading of Hegel: one which aims to account *both* for how essence limits being, *and* for the way in which being limits itself as essence. Now this doubling is exemplary of a series of pairings in the *Logic*, and the relation between a boundary (*Grenze*) and a limit (*Schranke*) is one of a series insofar as identity is always a synthesis of what is and what is not. As soon as the proletariat constitutes itself politically, for example, it presupposes a separation from those who are outside the party who now act as its negation or limit. As the party, the proletariat can only determine itself *politically*—that is to say, limit itself—insofar as it is not the mass, but it is the party that divides and connects them, for only in this way can the party determine itself *viz* its other, the mass. And yet, it is only by limiting, and being limited by, the mass, that the party constitutes itself *and* determines itself as a party (which means that, logically, the party is always beyond or outside of itself, its own limit). But how does the political constitution of the proletariat differ from the party’s representation as its limit? If I am reading James correctly, the proletariat constitutes itself by dividing itself from what limits it and, within these limits, thereby secures itself, but it is not until it has fully determined itself as the party that its realization as the party is experienced as a limit. Further, it is only at this moment that the party withdraws from the mass.

This tension, according to which the concept of the proletarian party is both subordinate to the mass and superior to it, could be followed throughout *Notes on Dialectics*: the relation between Leninism and Trotskyism, labor and bureaucracy, leap and logic, party and mass and so on, could be said to derive from this agonistic split in James’ understanding of the party and its relation to its foundational other, the mass. The party, on this view, can only secure itself as sovereign through the negation of the mass and can only stabilize itself by determining the mass as the boundary that completes it. For this very reason, the proletarian party is nothing more than the limitation that founds it, the limit that is internal to mass mobilization (that is, the inevitable relapse (itself entirely empirical) of impulse into organization, but also the *Trieb* that exceeds the limits of all political organization), and through which

it is constituted politically. It is only when the proletariat ceases to be the mass and becomes a distinct historical class that the party distinguishes itself. It is the party, then, that infinitely separates revolutionary spontaneity from its realization, and that subjects it to its own bureaucracy. But the party, too, as the figure for this delimitation; a figure that cannot create its own boundary, but merely delimits itself from within a limiting structure. In this sense, *Notes on Dialectics* is decidedly ambiguous about the uneasy complicity or veiled antagonism between the people and the party and, by implication, the political legacy of the party as a revolutionary organization. It is a suspicion shared by Fanon, who writes: “In certain circumstances, the party political machine may remain intact. But as a result of the colonialist repression and of the spontaneous reaction of the people the parties find themselves out-distanced by the militants” ([3], p. 72). For Hallward, by contrast, “Fanon rediscovers a lesson learned by Lenin in the wake of an anti-capitalist victory in 1917: in order to sustain a truly inclusive will of the people, in order to establish the rule of genuine democracy, the people must first smash its bourgeois simulacrum” ([5], p. 125). As with Hallward’s remarks about self-mastery, missing here is any suspicion that the party could itself be that simulacrum and precisely in its delimitation of the people’s will as finite and representable. The fact remains, however, that in James’ analysis of the party he repeatedly distinguishes between its historical limitations and what it is politically by virtue of this limit. One reason for this may have been itself political: a sense that the party as historically understood necessarily introduces a moment of radical instability in the very notion of the proletariat, and precisely because the party makes undecidable the relation between sovereignty and what is ordinarily taken to be the people’s will; indeed, the bureaucratic transformation of the party raises the question are there even grounds for deciding (between the leap and revolutionary organization)? Since James never uses the phrase “will of the people” in *Notes*, this insistence—that the proletariat *becomes* itself by ceasing to be ‘the people’—is already an *interpretation* on James’ part, and quite an astute one at that, with which Hegel implicitly agrees by placing the word boundary as the definition of how something distinguishes itself from something else, and thus forms a boundary. Hegel writes: “through the boundary something is what it is, and in the boundary it has its quality” ([14], p. 126). The revolutionary proletariat becomes itself by means of the party, but in itself it remains a boundary to (or on the other side of) the party as historical limit. Clearly, for James, the party is always other to the mass, and the proletariat is the boundary that allows the mass to politically determine itself (as the limit to bourgeois politics). This would mean that it is possible to conceive of a relation *between* the mass and the party in which both cease to be *limited* by the other. That is to say, the emergence of a difference that is neither the mass nor party but the constitutive contamination of each: the wretched, for example, that is not itself identifiable as a boundary or limit. This would class what James calls mass mobilization not in Leninist terms, but in terms similar to Fanon (and despite Fanon’s equally insistent argument that the wretched was *not* the proletariat). If James opposes proletarian invention to the bureaucratic state machinery of the party, it is because the proletariat ceases to be sovereign as soon as it becomes one with the party. It would appear then that the mass can only enter into the circuit of will as a *Trieb*, that is to say, as the infinite incompleteness or deferral of itself, unendingly. The party is the name of this infinite inhibiting limit. But, then, according to James, it is the traditional (the old vanguardist) concept of the party which annuls the mass as boundary, thereby allowing the party to appropriate all possibility of otherness to the statist version of itself (*i.e.*, Stalinism), and bringing the whole thing back within the bounds of the party as the

only sovereign subject (Trotskyism). The party relates to everything outside of itself not as a boundary, but as something which it is *not*, the other (or enemy) which is essentially its negation as a politics.

If Fanon can be shown to be opposed to the same kind of limited meaning of the political that James is opposed to here, does that mean that they are both really saying the same thing? Both regard invention as discontinuous, as a radical overturning of that which has ossified or become a fetish. And yet this proposition does not fully articulate the differences between them, which is not simply the result of James' more Marxist, dialectical presentation. In Fanonism, invention is bound to a form of *jouissance*, that is to a kind of radical expenditure without subject or recuperation. *Towards the African Revolution* offers itself, and its writing, as a praxis of *disobedience* which leaves no language or position intact. James is far more exhortatory (to the reader), but also joltingly ironic. In *Notes*, James exhorts the reader to recognize the meaning of what is being said, to recognize and so transform it; in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the reader is urged to grasp that which prevents his reflection from coinciding with itself, as the trace of something else. To read is to take a step, to be inventive, but this outcome cannot be prepared for nor prescribed. For Fanon, in brief, the leap remains a question; it has no thematic content (materialist, humanist, political), and yet without it no decision is possible, or is recognizable as such. This is why its locus (to name only one) is the tabula rasa: an inscription that is always the abyss of itself.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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